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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 001294

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EMB CLEARS SHARING MESSAGE WITH AHTISAARI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#) [YI](#) [MW](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA: PRESIDENT TADIC ON UPCOMING TRIP TO U.S.

Classified By: POL COUNSELOR GUSTAVO DELGADO PER REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador met with President Tadic on 9 August to discuss preparations for his upcoming visit to the U.S., scheduled for the first week of September. Tadic returned to the usual broad themes) the need for elections before the end-game on Kosovo; the need to work closely with Kostunica,s DSS (and the IC) in organizing a &democrats vs. radicals8 campaign; vague assurances that he will move quickly to turn the page and focus on post-Kosovo issues after status is settled. Tadic is ready to talk about a strategic partnership that goes beyond Kosovo status but his trademark caution still raises questions about what he is willing to do to make it happen.

12. (U) We will need Washington,s input on the SOFA NLT 8/21 if we are to have any chance of getting it through the GOS in time for the Secretary to sign it with Tadic. A scene-setting message for Tadic,s trip will follow septel. End summary

13. (U) Tadic started by reviewing items pending before he departs for the U.S. He said it was important to confirm General Ponos as Chief of the General Staff quickly, ideally before his trip. He referred to ratification of the SOFA agreement in the same vein, noting the need to get the green light from the U.S. so he would have enough time to work it through the government when it reconvenes on 17 August. He referred to ongoing private discussions with the PM,s staff and efforts to arrange a meeting between him and Kostunica to push Ponos and the SOFA through and to begin talking about more coordinated efforts in preparation for possible elections.

14. (C) In response to the Ambassador,s question on whether he was prepared to appoint Ponos unilaterally if Kostunica refused, Tadic demurred, noting his need to preserve maximum space for future collaboration with Kostunica. Tadic said he feared that if he pressed the issue on his own the government might withhold desperately needed funds from the military as a way to undermine his authority over the armed forces. Tadic said Kostunica,s recent effort to claim authority over anti-terrorist forces in the army was a &dangerous move8 and he was heartened that the Defense Minister had clarified the comment in the press several days later. Tadic urged us to use our contacts with the government, including the Finance minister, to push the pending defense related items.

15. (C) The Ambassador touched on several points in

preparation for Tadic,s visit to Washington. The Ambassador encouraged Tadic to actively engage in his meetings on ways of strengthening bilateral ties in the future. ICTY cooperation was critical. The Ambassador reminded Tadic of our 11 action points passed to the GOS and him. Tadic said he would continue to do everything he could to support the government,s efforts and acknowledged the need to add more details to the government,s own Mladic Action plan.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador observed that while the outcome of the Kosovo settlement talks was generally known and likely be difficult for Serbia, it would be manageable. There was no expectation that Serbia would &welcome8 the outcome; the important thing was to quickly move on in a constructive way. Tadic recalled what he had told Ambassador Wisner during his recent late July visit to Serbia: he would begin the day after the settlement to strengthen his relations with the three axes of Serbia,s foreign policy (U.S., Europe and Russia). The trip to the U.S. would allow him to get a jump start on that effort. For that reason, he hoped to sign the SOFA agreement with Secretary Rice and planned to continue on to Ohio to meet with the head of the National guard there. (Tadic agreed that it made sense to also meet with the governor and other local civilian leaders in Ohio to talk about the full range of cooperation opened up under the State Partnership Program (SPP).)

¶7. (C) The Ambassador praised Tadic for his positive response to the recent Contact Group demarche and for his help in ensuring that Serbia stayed engaged in Vienna. Tadic said that he was reassured by Kostunica that the PM had no intention of pulling out of the talks. Tadic said, however, that he was concerned about reports that Ahtisaari, in a

BELGRADE 00001294 002 OF 002

private meeting with Serb negotiators after the minority rights discussion in Vienna on 8 July, had said that Serbia was &guilty as a nation for what happened in Kosovo.8 Tadic said he was surprised given the IC,s focus on individual responsibility; a public statement by Ahtisaari to that effect would create huge problems for Tadic. The Ambassador noted increasing concern about developments in northern Kosovo and urged Tadic to commit to using his influence as well as his authority as commander in chief to ensure against any dangerous mischief. Tadic said he would do so, but noted his own worries how things would develop on the ground.

¶8. (C) Tadic returned to his oft-repeated arguments about the need for early elections before the Kosovo settlement is announced. The Ambassador said that the we would be ready with an aggressive Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign to help get democratic voters to the polls; was Tadic ready to do the coalition building that would be necessary? Tadic said he would be working with the PM as well as with all the small democratic parties to defeat the Radicals. He would not be able to support FM Draskovic to continue as FM (&my party would revolt if I did anything to block early elections8) but would consider enlisting his SPO party further down the line. The next election, said Tadic, would be the most important in Serbia,s history. It would be important to work closely in the GOTV and to carefully control the NGO,s involved.

¶8. (C) Comment: Tadic showed once again his preference to discuss Serbia,s future, after Kosovo. He is committed to a stronger relationship with the U.S. and with Europe if not always willing to push decisively in the right direction. His upcoming visit will offer an opportunity to engage him in a direct way on his vision of the future as well as his plans for getting there.

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